

One Testimony Among Untold Millions



Working in a boysenberry field

Born the year 1957 in Silverton, Oregon, I was the fifth of eight children. My family mostly originated from a German heritage. We lived on about a hundred acres near Scotts Mills, a small country town. The property I grew up on is currently owned by my brother who operates an organic vegetable business for local customers. My father told me this century farm is part of the land our great grandfather, Joseph, purchased in 1874 from fur trappers. Prior to this, these men had been granted this land for their retirement by the Hudson Bay Company.

My father was a stereotypical Oregonian who worked both as a woodsman and a farmer. Later he became employed by the United States Postal Service. Dad was a quiet, gentle man. I saw him persistently do his best to undertake whatever task was necessary to serve his family, church and society. Two great qualities he possessed which I admired were not repaying evil to a person who wronged him as well as not making use of inappropriate language. He led by example, always putting forth the effort necessary to provide sustenance and enjoyment for his household.



The farmhouse where I was raised



My parents - Charles & Cecelia

My mother was an extremely hard worker. She visited my classroom on a regular basis. She also attended most of the sporting events or extracurricular activities which I took part in. She did the same for all of my brothers and sisters. I don't know how she found enough time to be so involved in our lives because she simultaneously maintained the home and worked on the farm. She survived on less sleep than necessary to support her family physically and emotionally. Mom

was consistently there for all of us. When I needed someone to talk with, she was the person I sought out.

Together, my parents gave us the foundation for honesty, morality and good work ethics. As an outcome, all eight siblings have become business owners or managers in a variety of occupations. Rather than being told we could do anything we wanted, as is commonly taught, we were always expected to do our best. We also saw this attribute demonstrated by both word and action.

Although I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church, during my childhood, I had absolutely no interest in God. When I was fourteen, the Harding family – whose children I attended grade school with – asked me if I wanted to join them in attending the local Conservative Baptist Church for Wednesday night meetings. My parents agreed this would be okay, so I went with them to these mid-week gatherings for a while. However, during that time I had still not developed interest in spiritual things.



Front: Joe & Faye Harding
Back: Mike, Doug and Renee

The first time I can remember paying attention to anything heavenly was in my sophomore year of catechism class (the Catholic equivalent to Sunday school). That year I had a teacher who used contextual readings from the Bible to share what the Scripture said. He was the first person I had ever seen take this approach. My most prominent memory of this is when he shared the passage where Ezekiel was given a vision of “dry bones” which represented how God would reconstruct the flesh of those who had died around these bones in the resurrection (Ezek. 37:1-14). Also, he recommended each of his students to get a Bible and read it. So, I asked my parents to buy me a Bible, and they did for Easter. I still have this New American Bible, which is the modern Catholic version.

In those days I was becoming very disillusioned with life. This had absolutely nothing to do with how I was raised. For, even today, I consider the quality of my upbringing to be well above the average most people experience. Now, when I reflect on my state of mind back at that time, I think my heart was troubled because I was confused about the meaning of life. I believe God was beginning to open my conscience to the awareness of my own sin which made me feel unhappy. When this was happening, I did not share the struggles which were

simmering in my mind with anyone. At one point, this emotional condition even led me to think about whether my life was worth living.

Around this time, one day my father and I were in Scotts Mills. Dad stopped the car on a hill-sloped street where we saw a certain fellow who looked like a hippie. I do not recall the reason for which we stopped, but this man approached us. The only part of this chance meeting I remember is what he said to me. He asked, 'Do you know if you are going to heaven?' I answered, 'I don't know.' He responded by saying, 'You better come to know.' This was the extent of our conversation. Then, we left. I never knew who this person was or ever saw him again. But, what he said that day seared itself into my memory and propelled me on a course to find answers for what he had asked.

The following summer I was working as an assistant cook at the Silverton cannery. One day I overheard the head cook sharing about Jesus Christ with the other assistant. Later on, when we were chatting, he asked me what my ambitions were. I told him I was thinking about becoming a priest. He then asked me what the four Gospels were titled in the New Testament. Of the four, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, I could only name two. This brief discussion showed me how little I really knew about the Bible. As I thought further, I began to realize personal convictions were not leading me to become a priest. I had just heard it was a good thing to do.

That fall, during my junior year in high school, I set out to find solutions for my curiosity from religious books. I suppose the reason I did not start with the Bible was because I was already familiar with it. Although, at the time, I had no idea how naïve I was about what is contained within its pages. My first effort to seek answers was making a beeline to the school library each morning before classes to read a copy of the Koran. I read an extensive amount of it. But, nothing I read inspired me so I lost interest.

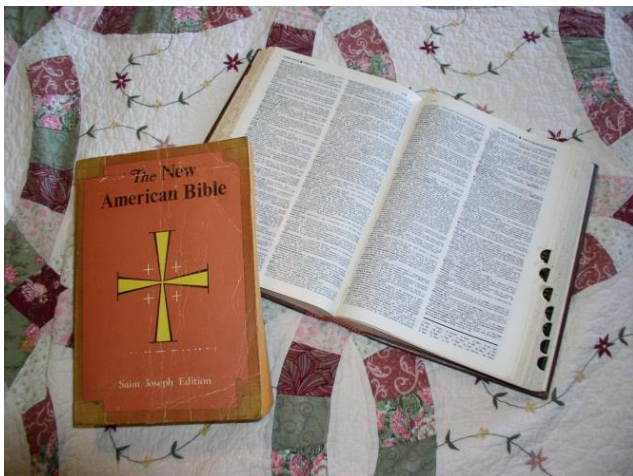
Then, I focused on a colorful hardcover book which I had received at the State Fair from followers of Krishna (associated with the Hindu religion). In that book, I saw images of odd creatures with multiple hands along with the related writings. But again, no ideas or pictures contained in those pages had much of an impact on me.

I also had a substantial encounter with Mormonism. A classmate at high school invited me to come to the Mormon Church. When I didn't go, I was given a hundred page booklet entitled something like *passages from the Bible which prove Mormonism is true*. I read the entire book. However, even with my limited knowledge of the Bible, I could see some of the explanations the author gave

about several Scripture verses were inconsistent with the context. As it turned out, I never did attend a meeting at this church.

Having exhausted these other options which were in my pathway of exposure, I began to read the Bible. Then, an incredible, supernatural thing happened in me. It was like a light turned on convincing me the Bible was true. Also, for the first time I began to understand parts of what I was reading. Some years later, when I first heard the famous chef, Emeril, say 'BAMM', I instantly likened this expression to the sensation I felt when my mind was being opened to the Scriptures. At the time this whole experience seemed very strange to me. I had no idea what was going on inside of me. Today as I look back, I know it was the Holy Spirit activating my mind and heart to receive the divine nature of the text.

When Christmas break came, I was spending extensive time upstairs in my room reading the Bible on my bed. Webster's Dictionary was close at hand since I did not understand the meaning of words such as "salvation", "righteousness", "sanctification", "hope", "glory" and many other terms. With the help of this reference book, along with gaining a sense of what expressions meant from repeated exposure, my comprehension grew.



I still have this New American Bible in my library. When I look through it, it is fascinating to read my personal notes recorded in the margins and look at the Scripture portions I had underlined. These markings serve as a knothole through which I can look back in time at some of the things which caught my attention during those early days of my spiritual journey.

Before long, I acquired a motorcycle which enabled me to more easily attend church meetings. It was my first set of wheels. I started going to the same Baptist church to which I had been introduced a few years earlier. I attended Sunday morning services there after attending Catholic mass. I also began to go to some Sunday and Wednesday evening gatherings. Increasingly I began to seek fellowship with many groups throughout the week including the Assembly of God, Friends (Quaker), Christian



My second street bike –
Honda 750cc Super Sport

Missionary Alliance, and World Outreach churches. In addition to these, I was involved in Campus Life get-togethers and prayer meetings at Silverton High School with other interested students.

Learning about the Bible and being around Christians became my obsession. This interested me. It made me feel good. My spirit was being fed, although I did not understand how or why. I was energized. For the first time since my search began, I felt optimistic about the road I was on because I was getting answers which satisfied the hunger in my soul.

Sometime during this striving I sensed the heavy burden of sin fall away from me. The feeling I experienced was similar to that of Christian, the storybook personality in *Pilgrim's Progress*, who I learned about years later while overhearing my wife read this book to our children. Without knowing it, I had been carrying around an emotional weight caused by the guilt of my own sin. Suddenly this heaviness was gone. All I knew was this had something to do with Jesus Christ's death on the cross for my sin. Even now, when I reminisce about this vivid memory it brings joy to my heart and tears to my eyes.

About that time, my God parents gave me a New Testament copy of the Living Bible Translation called *Reach Out*. When my junior year ended, I took a five day



My trip car - 1952 Ford sedan

trip around Southern Oregon in one of my dad's cars. During this excursion, I read from this book every day focusing on the four Gospel Accounts. I traveled to places where I had never been, including Crater Lake, which gave me the opportunity to explore new things. Nevertheless, I spent most of my free time reading the Scriptures.

Throughout my senior year, I developed more relationships with Christians who helped me further understand things pertaining to God from His Word. At high school, I was seen toting around a recently acquired New American Standard Bible and wearing a myrtle wood cross hung around my neck with a leather cord. Also, I began to memorize various verses which I discovered during my personal Bible reading. Gradually, the yearnings in my spirit were being fulfilled.

At that time, one of the verses I remember helping me understand what my recent salvation involved is Second Corinthians 5:21. It reads, "He (God) made the one who knew no sin (Jesus) to become sin in our behalf, in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." It amazed me to think that I could be

“righteous” before God, because I had been learning He would not accept me unless I was perfect. Since it was becoming clear to me I could not be faultless on my own, I recognized the need to trust in Jesus’ loving act of suffering the penalty of death in my place. Now that my sin was taken care of, I was acceptable to God.

Over time I came to realize the sacrifice Jesus made for me was sufficient to pay the price for every sin I had ever committed. I also came to understand His payment was so flawless; it did not need to be improved upon or repeated. A significant verse which helped me grasp these ideas is Hebrews 9:12. It reads, “Neither through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered into the sanctuary once for all, after having found eternal redemption” (this “sanctuary” He entered was the *presence of God*, v. 24).

This passage clarifies the countless animal sacrifices in the Old Testament did not really forgive sin because they were not perfect. In contrast to those offerings, the “once for all” sacrifice of Jesus Christ obtained “eternal redemption” for those who believe. This and other scriptures helped me understand Jesus’ *one time* death on the cross paid the penalty “*for all*” the sin of mankind, and this single payment extended *for all eternity* (Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27; 10:10).

Another verse which aided my conception of how I was saved is Ephesians 2:8-9. It says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not from you, it is a gift of God; not from works, in order that no one might boast.” This verse taught me salvation is obtained by “faith” in the work of Jesus Christ, and not gained because of my own “works”. I was getting it – only Jesus’ work on the cross could free me from the otherwise inevitable punishment for my sin. Plus, this deliverance had nothing to do with anything I did (Rom. 3:20-26; Titus 3:5; Heb. 9:14).

It was a helpless feeling when I came to realize I was not good enough to go to heaven by my own works. But, I remember progressively thanking God as I came to understand Jesus’ death had purchased this salvation for me (1 Cor. 18-31).

The events surrounding my conversion are not as dramatic as what many Christians experience. I did not need to forget my childhood because of pain stemming from abuse. I did not emerge out of a drug riddled background like some believers. Nor, did I undergo an emotional breakdown as others have. And, I did not experience devastating financial or interpersonal loss comparable to certain people before they turned to God. My salvation was quiet and personal. For the most part, it materialized by direct exposure to the Bible, not through the persuasion of other individuals.

Each believer has their own story about the spiritual transformation which happened to them when they pursued God through the truth found in His Word. Yet, everyone who takes this course progresses toward the same destination of fulfillment and satisfaction. This is the ultimate outcome awaiting all those who become connected with our Creator through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Salvation is very simple, so let me leave you with one final thought. It took a man who looked like a down-trodden member of society to ask me, 'Do you know if you are going to heaven?' I thank God I can now answer this question with a definite 'YES!' A portion of Scripture which helped me develop confidence in the belief I was headed to heaven is First John 5:13. It says, "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you might know you have eternal life." This verse told me I could "know" right now that I "have" (*possess*) "eternal life" while living here on earth (Eph. 1:7).

Do you personally have an answer for the going-to-heaven question? The biblical solution for qualifying to enter heaven is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It centers first on His death for our sin and then on His resurrection three days later, which made the life of God available to us. If you don't know whether or not you are going to heaven, I hope you will join all Christians throughout history by trusting the Living One who is the lone mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:4-5). For, every man or woman who places their faith in Jesus Christ has already begun to experience the benefits of eternal life while still living in this world. Then, after this life, all Christians will enjoy complete righteousness and unending bliss when we come into the presence of the only true God (1 Thess. 1:9-10).



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New Testament quotes are original translations by the author from the Greek text.